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Bipartisan Delegation Traveled to Kabul, Kandahar, Met with Civilian, Military Leaders, U.S. Troops

(ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN) - Congressman Russ Carnahan traveled this weekend to Kabul and Kandahar, Afghanistan as part of a House Foreign Affairs Committee trip to review security and reconstruction efforts underway. The bipartisan delegation met with General Stanley McChrystal, the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan, Afghan President Hamid Karzai and other U.S. and allied leaders, as well as American troops who are working to help the Afghan people rebuild their nation after years of Taliban control.

"Our men and women in uniform are still hard at work in Iraq and Afghanistan, putting their lives on the line to help make America safer and more secure," Carnahan said. "We have to make sure that the reconstruction strategies we're employing support success on the ground. It's critical to the self-sufficiency of Afghanistan, the safety of our troops, and the security of the world."

Carnahan said that new partnership strategies between the U.S. military and the Afghan people are helping to yield economic opportunities that will support Afghan independence and self-reliance. The Missouri National Guard Agricultural Development program, for instance, pairs troops with a civilian background in farming with Afghan farmers to teach them sustainable farming practices and techniques. Agriculture is the single most important industry in overwhelmingly rural Afghanistan, with 80 percent of all Afghanis making their living from farming.

"Our troops are doing remarkable work that too often goes unreported," said Carnahan. " They are partnering with the Afghan people to build new economic opportunities. And with economic opportunity comes stability and self-sufficiency, which will make all of us safer and more secure."

As Chairman of a key Foreign Affairs oversight subcommittee, Carnahan said that one of his top priorities for the trip was to gather information about how taxpayer funds are being used. In February, during his first hearing as Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight, Carnahan received testimony about fraud and abuse perpetrated by private contractors working in Iraq, and how lessons learned from this experience could ensure stricter oversight and effective management of taxpayer funds in future reconstruction efforts. Last month, Gen. McChrystal expressed concern about the number of private contractors being used Afghanistan, noting that he didn't believe that outsourcing security and other work saved any money. (AP, 4/16/2010).

"We have a responsibility to our men and women in uniform and to the taxpayers of this country to make sure that we have a strict accounting of how resources are being spent,"

Carnahan said.

"We cannot waste resources that our troops need to keep themselves safe and get the

job done."

The delegation wrapped up their trip in Islamabad, Pakistan, where they spent the last day meeting with officials to discuss ongoing coalition efforts to rebuild Afghanistan and fight terrorism throughout the region.

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